DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 367 908 CE 066 156

AUTHOR Rachal, John R.
TITLE The Adult Education "Tree": A Revision.
PUB DATE [90]
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; *Adult Education; *Adult Learning; *Classification; *Educational Attitudes; *Lifelong Learning; Role of Education; Social Action; *Student Motivation

ABSTRACT

The typology of adult education offered in the October 1988 issue of "Lifelong Learning" examined a number of classifications, including the Bryson scheme (1936) and the Grattan categories (1955). Since the publication of that article, suggestions have been made for additions to the typology "tree" proposed in the article. The typology categorizes adult education by its "content-purpose"; that is, the general content type that suggests its purpose. The six major limbs of this tree represent the major types of adult education: liberal, occupational, self-help, compensatory, scholastic, and social action. Several of these categories have subcategories. Self-directed learning is part of the roots of the tree, since all adult education is clearly institution based. The focus in this revision is on social action and its political dimension. Social action is, by definition, political, and social action clearly implies an agenda for social (political) change. The tree is to be seen as part of a long tradition of categorizing the field of adult education; the image of a tree is appropriate since the effort is always growing and changing. (KC)

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ED 367 908

The Adult Education "Tree": A Revision

John R. Rachal

University of Southern Mississippi

Southern Station Box 5154

University of Southern Mississippi

Hattiesburg, MS 39406-5154

(601) 266-4621

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Abstract

This article extends a typology of adult education offered in the October, 1988 issue of Lifelong Learning. The typology categorizes adult education by its "content-purpose," i.e., its general content type which suggests its purpose. The major limbs of this tree, representing the major types of adult education, are: Liberal, Occupational, Self-Help, Compensatory, Scholastic, and Social Action. Several of these have sub-categories. The focus in this revision is on Social Action and its political dimension. The tree is to be seen as part of a long tradition of categorizing the field of adult education.

The Adult Education "Tree": A Revision

In October of 1988, Lifelong Learning published "Taxonomies and Typologies of Adult Education" (Rachal, 1988) in which a number of typologies were examined, including the Bryson scheme (1936) and the Grattan categories (1955). In that same tradition, which structured adult education by general areas of content and/or broad purpose of the educational endeavor, the Lifelong Learning article presented a "tree" in which five types (and their sub-types) were presented: Liberal, Occupational, Self-Help, Compensatory, and Scholastic. A truncated version of the article and discussion of the tree were also presented at the 1988 AAACE Conference. Since that time, the author has received several valuable suggestions which, taken together, suggest the need for a revision, or, more precisely, a few additions.

One concern was that there was no provision among the "roots" for individualized, self-directed learning, since all the roots in the original tree were institutions. Clearly not all adult education is institution-based, and the addition of self-directed learning among the roots is a valuable suggestion. It is an especially useful addition regarding the Liberal,

Occupational, and Self-help limbs; not all liberal adult education takes place in universities, for example.

Another issue concerned the increasing phenomenon of the adult returning to college, either for undergraduate or graduate degrees. In view of this growing population, one suggestion was to add it as a separate limb. Two arguments, however, were persuasive in the choice not to do this. One is that adult educators from Bryson (1936) to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) have tended to exclude traditional college education from adult education, though the latter authors observe, "Admittedly this distinction is increasingly difficult to make as more and more older people become full-time students for extended periods of time" (p. 15). A college education may well be adult education to those adults engaged in pursuit of a degree, and Knowles (1964) considers it a Type 1 institutional form of adult education, in which the primary and initial focus is on youth education but adult education has been added as a secondary activity.

But a second reason degree-seeking adult education was not given a separate limb is that the motives for adults seeking degrees are covered by the existing limbs. Some adults pursue degrees for the intellectual

growth associated with liberal education, others for the professional advancement associated with the Occupational limb. Of course, commonly one finds some blend of Occupational, Self-help, and Liberal motives.

But it is Professor Mezirow of Columbia University who suggested the single most significant change to the tree: the addition of a "Social Action" limb. Within this limb would be, he suggests, such activities as peace education, environmental education, drug education, and the fostering of understanding of major public issues. The social action role of adult education was, for Lindeman, the essence of adult education; social action, to him, was what adult education really was. At any rate, Mezirow's suggestion is most valuable and was the primary impetus behind this revision. It is also strongly reminiscent of Bryson's (1936) "political" category.

Social action is, by definition, political, and social action clearly implies an agenda for social (political) change. The question then arises, "Whose social (political) agenda should the adult educator follow?" Individual adult educators must make their personal and individual choices--and this is why having an adult education philosophy is important. But because such choices are individual, they are

necessarily multifarious and even contradictory. The typologist--as opposed to the individual--must therefore describe rather than prescribe, and include all social action, whether identified with liberal or conservative political ends, in the Social Action limb. What makes social action a form of adult education is the degree to which it is educative, rather than its political orientation. That it must be "educative," of course, is not an entirely satisfactory criterion, as one person's education is another's propaganda. Everett Dean Martin (1926) captured this idea nicely when he disapprovingly quoted an advertiser's little sophistry: ". . . when your side of the case is given publicity, that is education; when your opponent publishes his side, that is propaganda" (p. 47). One is tempted to make a distinction between education and propaganda on the basis of verifiable, demonstrable "knowledge" as contrasted with unverifiable assertion or belief, or with half-truth. But such words raise their own set of questions, and so this conundrum may best be left to the epistemologists. Among adult educators, however, Martin (1926), perhaps, offers the best discussion of this problem in his chapter "Liberal Education vs. Propaganda," in which he observes that propaganda is the enemy of education in that it tries

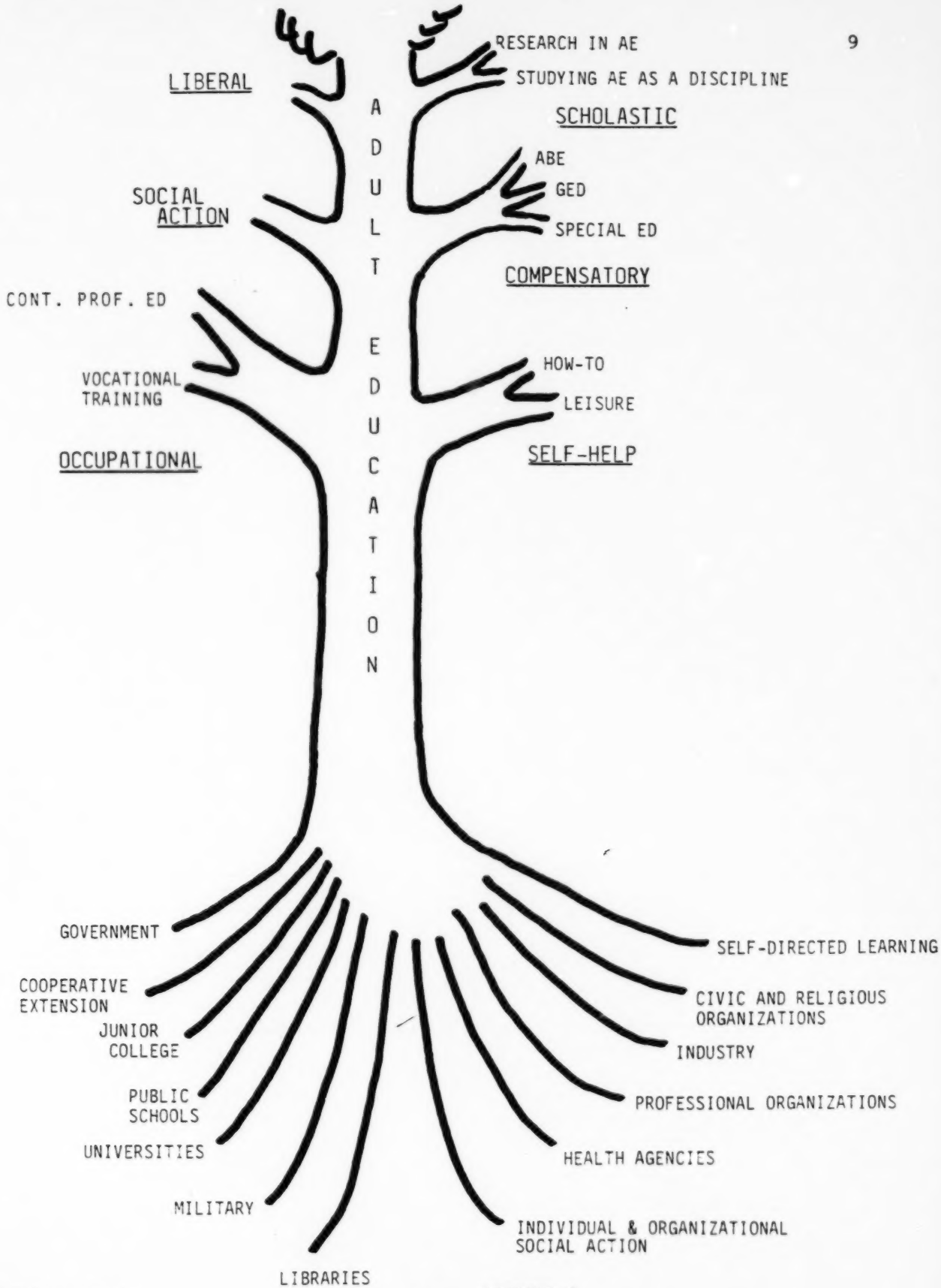
to close the doors to thought that education tries to open:

> The propagandist is interested in <u>what</u> people think; the educator in <u>how</u> they think. . . . [The propagandist]. . . wishes people to come to a conclusion; to accept his case and close their minds and act. The educator strives for the open mind. He has no case to prove which may not later be reversed. (p. 48).

Without further probing such distinctions, and given some element of persuasion inherent in all education, suffice it to say that the adult education typologist, acting in a descriptive rather than a prescriptive capacity, focuses on the educative element rather than the particular political orientation of the social action agenda. To whatever extent their objectives are educative, for example, "pro-choice" and "pro-life" groups could both be engaged in adult education. Lastly, social action adult education can take place under the auspices of organized agencies such as the Peace Corps, Amnesty International, or Mothers Against Drunk Driving, but it can also take place on an essentially individual or grass roots basis, such as Freire's work in Brazil. This is reflected in the additional root to the tree,

Individual and Organizational Social Action.

As indicated in the original article, adult education is such a multi-faceted enterprise that a typology in the form of a living, changing organism seems appropriate. The author wishes to thank those whose suggestions allowed the tree to grow.



(RACHAL, 1989)

FIGURE 1

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